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# World Summit on Sustainable Development

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**General debate**

## Letter dated 5 August 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

With reference to the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September 2002 and in my capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of August 2002, I am transmitting to you herewith the text of the League of Arab States Initiative on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region, adopted at the League's high-level meeting held in Cairo, Egypt, on 30 and 31 July 2002, for approval as a type-2 initiative and for circulation as a document of the Summit.

(*Signed*) Fuad Mubarak **Al-Hinai**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations
Chairman of the Arab Group

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## Annex to the letter dated 5 August 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs

[Original: Arabic]

## Initiative on Sustainable Development in the Arab Region

Since the 1992 Rio Summit there have been concrete achievements in the Arab region in the sustainable development field, specifically in health and education and with regard to standards of living. There are, however, also a number of obstacles facing the Arab countries in the further promotion of sustainable development, and they include the absence of peace and security, continued foreign occupation of some Arab territories, poverty, illiteracy, population growth, the burden of indebtedness, the aridity of the region and its limited arable land and water resources, the limited capacities of academic research centres and the fact that experience of civil society is comparatively new.

With the adoption of the Arab Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Development in Cairo on 25 October 2001, the League of Arab States, acting through the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) and the other specialized ministerial councils and in cooperation with the inter-Arab, regional and international organizations, took an integrated regional approach to the development of the Regional Programme of Action for Sustainable Development. The League expects the international community to help the Arab countries to meet the challenges and overcome the obstacles peculiar to the region. It welcomes the readiness shown by the international community to implement Agenda 21 and achieve the development goals set forth in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the outcome of the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

This Initiative seeks to meet the challenges facing the Arab States in achieving sustainable development. It affirms their commitment to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the achievement of the development goals set forth in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the outcome of the World Summit for Sustainable Development while taking account of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It endeavours to promote the more active and forceful participation of the Arab States so as to highlight their efforts to achieve sustainable development, especially in the light of globalization and its impact, and create a mechanism to fund environmental protection programmes and achieve sustainable development.

This Initiative provides a general framework for the programmes and activities that can be implemented with the resources available to the Arab States, the inter-Arab, regional and international organizations concerned and the inter-Arab, regional and international financial institutions, by building partnerships with other regions and groupings and international organizations and institutions in the global context for the achievement of sustainable development and with the participation of all partners at all national and regional levels and, in particular, of civil society, including the media. In the areas listed below, the Initiative has the following goals:

**Peace and security**

To create, in order to consolidate the progress of sustainable development, an appropriate environment at the regional level to promote the achievement of peace and security, including an end to occupation and the abandonment of threats of aggression and interference in the internal affairs of other States, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the norms of justice;

To protect the environment and natural resources of peoples under occupation and restore the economic and social structures destroyed by the occupation;

**Institutional framework**

To support and strengthen institutional structures in the field of sustainable development in the Arab countries by, inter alia, developing and implementing the necessary policies and laws;

To support the efforts of the League of Arab States to construct a mechanism to address sustainable development at the regional level;

**Poverty eradication**

To support, especially by funding small-scale projects, regional, subregional, national and local programmes and plans of action and technical and institutional cooperation in order to mitigate severe poverty, special attention being paid to the role of women;

**Population and health**

To promote the development of integrated population policies, improve primary health care services and enhance advocacy programmes for family planning and child and maternal welfare;

To support efforts to improve the health of the population by providing clean water, safe food and sanitation services and by controlling hazardous chemicals and all forms of pollution;

**Education, advocacy, scientific research and transfer of technology**

To support the development of national strategies and programmes for education and literacy as part of the strategy for the eradication of poverty; and to support the achievement of the internationally approved targets for education, including those stipulated in the United Nations Millennium Declaration;

To encourage the transfer and absorption of appropriate technology to and within the Arab region; to develop Arab scientific and technological research capacities and institutions in order to meet the challenges confronting the Arab region; to make use of the relevant technical support made available by international institutions and organizations; and to urge the industrialized countries to meet their obligations in this regard under the relevant international agreements;

To support the development of an information technology system by means of complementary initiatives; and to provide a suitable environment to attract investment in this field to the Arab region;

To encourage initiatives for the consolidation of national and regional capacities in the field of environmental information, such as the 2002 Abu Dhabi Initiative on Environmental Information;

To encourage Arab award programmes relating to the environment and sustainable development, such as the Zayed International Prize for the Environment and the Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Preservation;

**Resource management**

To encourage the integrated management of water resources, including river basins and catchment areas, in accordance with the norms of international law and existing agreements; to develop legislation; and to increase the benefit derived from ongoing activities at sources, along watercourses and at outlets;

To protect water sources, including groundwater and wetlands ecosystems, from contamination; to support efforts to develop alternative water sources; and to take action to develop new seawater desalination, rainwater collection and water recycling techniques;

To support the development and implementation of national policies and programmes for agricultural research, especially in agricultural methods appropriate to the region and harvesting techniques for arid lands;

To support regional, subregional and national implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification through the mechanisms in place in the region for the development and implementation of existing programmes of action;

To urge the international community to augment the efforts of the Arab countries to apply integrated management strategies to their coastal areas, given the concentration of populations in coastal areas in the Arab region and the importance of the implementation in the region of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and other regional seas programmes for the protection and conservation of the marine environment and biological diversity;

To call upon the international community to augment the efforts of the Arab States for the sustainable development of their mountainous regions, for afforestation and reforestation and for capacity-building for the sustainable management of mountains and forests;

To urge the international community to augment the efforts of the Arab States to develop a regional programme for the protection of biological diversity that would include the establishment of a regional gene bank and the implementation in the region of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity;

To urge the international community to augment the efforts of the Arab States to deal with the deterioration of air quality in many Arab cities by means of urban planning strategies, the designation of land-use zones, emissions control

programmes and the construction of regional and subregional sustainable transport systems and networks;

To urge the international community to augment the efforts of the Arab States to institute sound chemical management, with particular focus on hazardous chemicals and wastes, by means of initiatives to help the Arab countries to establish national registers of chemicals, elaborate regional and national frameworks and strategies for the management of chemicals and designate national contact points on chemicals;

To promote the wider use of safe and clean production machinery and techniques, the cleaner and more efficient use of oil and natural gas, and the establishment of carbon sinks by planting forests;

To bolster Arab capacities for the implementation of the multilateral environmental conventions and their mechanisms with the technical and material support of the international community;

To urge the industrialized countries to meet their obligations under the international environment conventions by agreeing to eliminate all forms of subsidies to the energy sector, specifically to coal and nuclear power, and all kinds of tax discrimination against petroleum products;

To secure technical assistance in order to strengthen the capacities of the Arab States, including the human and institutional capacities required for effective disaster management and monitoring and early-warning systems;

**Consumption and production**

To promote the concept of patterns of sustainable production and consumption in the Arab region; and to encourage the use of products that help protect natural resources;

**Globalization, trade and investment**

To urge the international community to reinforce the efforts of the Arab States to avoid the adverse consequences globalization has for them at the technological, economic, environmental and social levels;

To step up Arab efforts to improve intermediary trade by strengthening and promoting the greater Arab free trade zone;

To improve the competitiveness of Arab goods; and to endeavour to have the industrial countries abolish all the subsidies, supports and restrictions that impede the entry of Arab goods into international markets;

To anticipate that the membership of the Arab States in the World Trade Organization will be facilitated and accelerated and that intensified international efforts to expand and diversify its economic base will be required;

To create a good Arab investment climate that encourages international and regional institutions to increase investment in the Arab States.

The Arab Initiative calls for support for partnership initiatives between developing and industrialized countries and for partnerships between States and civil-society organizations and the private sector, on the understanding that such partnerships should be fair and non-selective and that they should not have political or economic conditions.

The programme of action to implement the Initiative will be elaborated in accordance with the provisions of the 2000 Jeddah Declaration on the Environment from an Islamic Perspective, the 2001 Abu Dhabi Declaration on the Future of Environmental Action in the Arab World, the 2002 Abu Dhabi Declaration on Agricultural Development and Desertification Control, and the 2002 Islamic Declaration on Sustainable Development. The results of the relevant regional and international conferences and seminars will be taken into consideration, such as the decisions of the 2001 Oman International Forum on Environment and Sustainable Development, the 2002 Dubai Declaration on the Integrated Management of Water Resources in Arid Regions, and the 2002 Muscat Declaration on the Oman International Conference on Development and the Management of Watercourses.

There are three fields that have been given priority for implementation. In cooperation with the relevant inter-Arab and regional organizations, the identification of projects is currently under way, and they will be implemented within the programme for the integrated management of water resources, the programme for the management of land degradation and desertification control and the programme for the integrated management of coastal areas. The three programmes and the projects will be ready for adoption by the regional mechanisms in late October 2002.